

# A Message from the Holmdel Township Board of Education

## The 2011-12 School Budget

As of March 16, the 2011-12 School Tax Levy proposed for voter approval on April 27, is a zero increase levy. It will not increase your taxes. The budget it funds focuses resources on our core mission of developing the potential of every student into achievement. It also reflects the results of a number of longer-term district efforts – energy conservation, negotiations and outsourcing transportation. It is the product of the hard work of our school administration, as well as the cooperation of our teachers and other school employees. An overview of this information was presented at our March 16 State of the District presentation, which will be repeated on April 13.

### **How did we arrive at a zero increase tax levy proposal, and what good things will it allow us to accomplish for our children? Let's take a look first at the financial side.**

Our energy conservation program began about two years ago when we entered an agreement with Energy Education, Inc., based in significant part on the recommendation of our Assistant Business Administrator Peter Mikos. In his prior district, Mr. Mikos had seen significant cost savings accrue from the program. It provides detailed information on energy use so districts can carefully schedule facility use, set thermostats, shut down lights and equipment after hours, etc. Led by our Energy Manager Mr. Bill Balicki (who is also our Director of Plant Operations and Maintenance), we also built a district-wide culture of conservation – lights and computers turned off at day's end; no private coffee pots, refrigerators etc. As a result, over 24 months we have saved \$1.8 million. These savings, plus other cost reductions, allowed us to weather the loss of more than \$2.7 million in state funding without the truly draconian staff cuts seen in other districts. Surprisingly, we are one of only about 20 NJ districts who partner with Energy Ed.

Our most recent round of negotiations with the HTEA took some 20 months of patient back and forth, culminating in a 0% salary increase for 2011-12. In addition stipends for coaches and advisors were held flat for the life of the contract, and some support staff starting salaries were reduced. Salaries constitute 64% of our budget. With those held largely flat, this gave us a unique opportunity to hold the levy even. The 2012-13 negotiated increase will be 2%, in line with the 2% levy cap, but a major challenge to keeping a flat levy a year from now.

We have been gradually outsourcing our transportation routes by attrition. Currently only 40% of our transportation routes are handled in-house. This fall we funded a study of our transportation operation. After research, including interviews with our drivers, the consultant recommended outsourcing the balance of our transportation at an estimated annual savings of \$455K, and selling most of the bus fleet for one-time revenue of about \$250K. The 2% levy cap, which is lower than the historic rate of inflation, forces us to make hard choices. We know this is difficult news for transportation personnel, and we are exploring with them possible alternative solutions. No matter the outcome, however, our decision will reflect our on-going commitment to supporting student learning experiences and achievement as our primary goal.

We were pleased to learn that for 2011-12 the state is restoring \$508K (or 20%) of the \$2.7 million in state aid cut (or clawed back) last year. It is impossible to know what state aid will be in the future.

### **What good things will the 2011-12 Budget allow us to accomplish for children?**

For quite some time we have seen lower verbal than math performance scores from our students on standardized tests. This is also true for our state and nation. We are working to address this imbalance through class size reduction, professional development and increased emphasis on Language Arts and Literacy. The proposed budget funds added staff for reading and literacy, as well as on-site K-6 professional development

offered by Columbia University. The professional development costs are also partially underwritten by grant funds and a shared service agreement with Monmouth University.

Differentiated instruction has been an on-going focus of our professional development. It equips teachers to meet students where they find them, and help each student convert his potential into achievement. The proposed budget supports differentiated instruction through professional development and by adding staff to support our Gifted and Talented program which is now expanding to four grades (3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup>). It also increases In-Class Support through a co-teaching approach using both a regular and special education teacher in one classroom.

The state's Core Curriculum Content Standards require that teachers infuse instruction in technology use into our children's regular classroom curriculum. The proposed budget undergirds those efforts with professional development as well as Technology Literacy Coaching support. It also funds replacing the Satz wood shop with a new computer lab.

Other needs addressed by the budget include added nursing support, primarily at Village whose large population includes a number of medically fragile and autistic children, but also in the other schools as needed. It also includes replacing the moveable partition walls in one of the high school "pod" classrooms with permanent, far more sound-proof walls. This will provide a quieter, more distraction-free learning environment.

We are pleased that, as of March 16, we are able to propose a zero increase school tax levy, while still moving forward with our mission of developing the potential of every student into achievement. Updated budget information will be posted on the district website whenever it becomes available. To hear more about the state of our district and the finalized budget, please come to our State of the District presentation on Wednesday, April 13 at 7 PM in the HHS Commons. The program will include an opportunity for questions and answers. We hope to see you there.

Election Day is late this year, and on an unusual day – **Wednesday, April 27, 2011**. The polls will be open from 2 – 9 PM. Please be sure to vote!

**On behalf of our Board colleagues,**

***Barbara J. Garrity, Vice President and Chair of Budget & Finance Committee***

There are two easy ways to stay informed of district/schools happenings. Please visit the district website at [www.holmdelschools.org](http://www.holmdelschools.org) for event updates, school announcements, district progress reports, board meeting information, and much more. You can also subscribe to our E-Alert at <http://www.holmdel.k12.nj.us/home/joinlist.shtm> to receive email alerts on your choice of topics, such as school security alerts, committee notes, parent support group minutes, the district calendar, career opportunities, and school lunch menus.